



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

April 13, 2005

News Release

ICE'S NATIONAL GANG CRACKDOWN REACHES 155 ARRESTS

Operation Community Shield Yields Results in New England

BOSTON—In testimony before Congress today, Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced that a national anti-gang initiative launched by ICE Feb. 23 has resulted in the arrest of more than 155 members of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in 19 U.S. cities.

At a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, Assistant Secretary Garcia provided lawmakers with the latest results of "Operation Community Shield," a nationwide ICE initiative to disrupt, dismantle, and prosecute violent gang members by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE.

Locally in New England, ICE agents have arrested three individuals under Operation Community Shield, two in Massachusetts and one in Rhode Island.

In Massachusetts, ICE agents recently arrested Dinora Chavarria, 20, and Oscar Aviles, 20, both of whom are affiliated with the Boston MS-13 cell. They both have past convictions for violent crimes, including assault and battery and assault with a dangerous weapon.

ICE previously removed Chavarria to her native Honduras, but she subsequently re-entered the United States illegally. She is now in ICE custody facing deportation to Honduras. Aviles is also in ICE custody facing deportation proceedings based upon his criminal conviction for assault with a dangerous weapon.

In Rhode Island, ICE agents recently arrested Rony Nijama, a 19-year-old MS-13 gang member charged with assaulting a Providence police officer. Nijama is in ICE custody facing deportation proceedings based upon his being in the United States illegally.

“Under Operation Community Shield, ICE is keeping the pressure on the MS-13 in order to dismantle their organizations and disrupt their operations,” said Robin M. Avers, special agent-in-charge of ICE in New England. “We’re sending a clear message that we will not tolerate gang violence and crime in our communities, and we’ll continue working with our local law enforcement partners to get these dangerous criminals off our streets.”

Operation Community Shield is a nationwide ICE initiative designed to disrupt and dismantle violent gang organizations and prosecute their members by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE. Under this initiative, ICE is employing its broad immigration authorities, both criminal and administrative, against gang members. At the same time, ICE uses its customs authorities to target narcotics smuggling and money laundering and to seek the forfeiture of assets.

Operation Community Shield draws on strong partnerships and cooperation with existing federal, state and local anti-gang efforts. Such partnerships are essentials to the success of the initiative and to ensure officer safety during operations. Locally, here in New England, ICE has partnered with the North Sore Gang Intelligence Unit, run by the Boston Police, the Boston Mass. Police Gang Unit, the Lynn Mass. Gang Unit, the Somerville Mass. Gang Unit, the Providence Rhode Island Police Gang Unit and the FBI.

Under Operation Community Shield, ICE has also taken several new steps to help other federal, state, and local agencies identify and target gang members. ICE’s Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) in Vermont is playing a critical role in this effort. The center is running MS-13 gang member data provided by state and local law enforcement agencies through various ICE and Homeland Security databases to help these agencies identify and locate violent gang members.

The law enforcement actions to date have been conducted in coordination with law enforcement at the federal, state and local levels. ICE will also be working through its 54 Attaché offices overseas to cooperate with foreign governments that are also experiencing gang problems, particularly those in Central America.

Assistant Secretary Garcia's testimony is posted on the Web at www.ice.gov.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.